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# A STUDY OF THE CURRENT MANNER IN WHICH PUBLIC TEACHING IS PORTRAYED TO OUR MOST ABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

A RESEARCH REPORT PRESENTED TO:
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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to portray the manner in which teachers informally recruit academically talented young people to the teaching profession, or to ascertain whether they do that at all. The underlying assumption was that one of the most effective ways to upgrade teaching over the long term, and provide for the best learning in American classrooms, was to get our brightest young people to enter the profession. We fear that we have gotten much more than we had bargained for in this study. It seems clear that teachers are actively discouraging academically talented students from considering a career in teaching. They are accomplishing this so effectively that virtually none of the students interviewed seriously considered public education as a career choice.

Our summary of how teachers see their job conditions would have to include the fact that they consider themselves poorly paid and lacking in respect from any of the important populations. They see their job as a highly frustrating and stressful endeavor. They feel overwhelmed with paper work and see absolutely no opportunity for career advancement. To their credit they still hold that teaching is enjoyable, interesting and satisfying. It is pleasing to see a commitment to young people despite job conditions.

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## THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the current manner in which public teaching is portrayed to our most able young people. We contend here that recruitment is initiated by the esteem which teachers hold for their professional roles. Further, the way in which the greater society in general views teaching is a vital contributor to whether or not high quality students choose to pursue public education as a career choice.

At the data level we sought here to discover what perceptions bright young people hold for the possibility of becoming teachers. In addition we examined the underlying perceptual basis for what educators might convey to students wishing to undertake a career exploration of teaching. Finally, we sought to identify in terms of job satisfaction teaching as perceived by the general public.

At the final level the objective was to determine whether or not able students are being effectively recruited to teaching by those who are most able to do so: teachers.

## SAMPLE AND INSTRUMENTATION

The samples in this study represented three separate but related populations: students, teachers, the public. The design called for the identification of one hundred able juniors and seniors in ten high schools in central Florida. This was accomplished through the examination of: grade point averages, College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT), Florida State Wide Assessment Test Scores. The results of the process identified one hundred students who could be considered in the top twenty-five percent of their classes.

In addition, one hundred teachers of these students were randomly selected. Finally, a non-systematic sample of one hundred individuals, who were not involved in any substantive way in public education, were selected at various public places by the field investigators.

A nominal instrument which incorporated several job related characteristics was designed and field tested. The device utilized two separate formats. The first called for nominal (Yes or No) responses to the following characteristics of teaching:

| | |
|---|---|
| Boring | Interesting |
| Overpaid | Requires patience |
| Dead End | Too much paperwork |
| Hard work | Respect from parents |
| Stressful | Emotionally rewarding |
| Enjoyable | Respect from students |
| Depressing | Respect from Community |
| Satisfying | Good working conditions |
| Good salary | Opportunity for advancement |
| Frustrating | Little Control of your own destiny |

In addition, six seven-point semantic differential scales were included in the instrument:

Underpaid - Overpaid
Boring - Interesting
Stressful - Relaxing
Unsatisfying - satisfying
Disrespectful - Respectful
You should be a teacher - You should not be a teacher

The student collection device consisted of a structured interview in which they were asked to explain their motivation for becoming a teacher and to explain their characterization of teaching as a direct result of the information they had received in school.

ANALYSIS

The responses to the Nominal-Semantic Differential instrument were analyzed using several procedures. Means, standard deviations and ninety-five per cent confidence intervals were derived for the nominal data. It should be noted that in this case the means corresponded to the proportions of "Yes" responses for each category. Means and standard deviations were derived for the semantic differential responses.

The means for educators and non-educators were tested for significance using multivariate analysis of variance (Bock, 1975).

A series of contingency tables was constructed for the nominal data comparing educators and non-educators. A chi square contingency test was applied to each table. In addition the uncertainty coefficient was derived for each classification (Theil, 1967).

Each contingency table was subjected to log-linear analysis. The procedure has many advantages in that it explains the discrepancies between the observed and expected frequencies and may be expressed in terms of parameters which are analogus to a 2X2 analysis of variance model. Consequently, we are able to test both the contribution of both main effects in addition to their interaction.

The results of the student interviews were content analyzed and the model responses were extracted. Reliability of the analysis was addressed by submitting the complete set of field notes to three separate panels for compilation. Only areas of congruence were reported.

Teaching as "Hard Work" produced an F value of 9.96 with an associated probability of less than .002. Ninety per cent of the educators perceived teaching to be hard work while seventy-three per cent of the non-educators felt that way. Generally, one would be safe in saying that both groups do see considerable work

in teaching.

The second variable to produce a significant difference (F=14.79, P=.000) was the degree to which the groups perceived teaching as "Enjoyable." Seventy-one per cent of the education group gave an affirmative response, while forty-five per cent of the non-educators felt that there was some enjoyment in teaching.

The third significant variable (F=10, 07, P=.002) was the amount of "Paper Work" associated with teaching. Sixty-one per cent of the educators saw too much paper work associated with teaching while only thirty-nine per cent of the non-educators felt that way.

The final nominal variable considered here which showed a considerable difference between educators and non-educators was the amount of "Frustration" associated with teaching (F=7.70, P=.006). Fifty per cent of the teachers saw teaching as frustrating while sixty-nine of the non-educators gave a positive response.

It may be observed that none of the semantic differential scales produced a significant difference. The response to "You Should Become a Teacher" proved noteworthy however. The mean for educators was 4.5 and 3.2 for non-educators. At best, this confirms an ambivalence toward offering a positive mandate to bright young people regarding teaching as a career.

The chi square values associated with "Hard Work", "Frustration", "Enjoyment", and "Paper Work", reached significance (P=.00, for all variables). The uncertainty coefficients showed reduction to five percent for "Hard Work", three per cent for "Frustration", five per cent for "Enjoyment", and four per cent for "Paper Work."

In the results of the saturated log linear analysis the education and non-education effect for teachers being "Over Paid" was the only one which produced a significance (Z=6.27). On the other hand, only "Frustration" and "Paper Work" failed to reach significance for the nominal parameter (Z=-2.32 and Z=-2.27).

Examination of the interaction component will reveal an exactly similar pattern of significance with that of the chi square analysis. "Hard Work", "Frustration", "Enjoyment", and "Paper Work", produced significant differences (Z=2.91,-2,72,3.67,3.08 respectively).

Giving proper deference to the pattern of significant differences, our data show the following results of teaching as a career choice:

1. Teaching is viewed as adequately paid by eight per cent of the population.

2. Seventy-two per cent of the population views teaching as

stress inducing.

3. Approximately thirty per cent of the population feels that teachers command the respect of students, parents and the community.

4. Sixty per cent of the population sees teaching as a frustrating enterprise.

5. Fifty per cent of the population sees too much paper work associated with teaching.

6. Thirty-three per cent of the population associates teaching with good working conditions.

7. Eleven per cent of the population sees a possibility of job advancement in teaching.

There appear to be some positive statistical findings however:

1. Seventy three per cent of the population holds that teaching is emotionally rewarding.

2. Eighty two per cent of the population feels that teaching is hard work.

3. Fifty eight per cent of the population feels that teaching is enjoyable.

4. Fifty eight per cent of the population feels that teaching is interesting.

5. Fifty nine per cent of the population feels that teaching is satisfying.

Upon completion of the content analysis of the interviews with able young students they felt that their teachers provided the following model of teaching:

There is no respect
The pay is very low
Teaching is interesting
Students are a "hassel"
Teaching is frustrating work
There is no future in teaching
Teaching is emotionally rewarding
There are lots of "hassels involved
There is no opportunity in teaching
There is too much outside interference
It is stimulating to work with young people
Students should waste their talents in a teaching career

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this study was to portray the manner in which teachers informally recruit academically talented young people to the teaching profession, or to ascertain whether they do that at all. The underlying assumption was that one of the most effective ways to upgrade teaching over the long term, and provide for the best learning in American classrooms, was to get our brightest young people to enter the profession. We fear that we have gotten much more than we had bargained for in this study. It seems clear that teachers are actively discouraging academically talented students from considering a career in teaching. They are accomplishing this so effectively that virtually none of the students interviewed seriously considered public education as a career choice.

Our summary of how teachers see their job conditions would have to include the fact that they consider themselves poorly paid and lacking in respect from any of the important populations. They see their job as a highly frustrating and stressful endeavor. They feel overwhelmed with paper work and see absolutely no opportunity for career advancement. To their credit they still hold that teaching is enjoyable, interesting and satisfying. It is pleasing to see a commitment to young people despite job conditions, which by industrial standards, would yield an advertisement announcing:

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

> We are seeking bright young people for instructional positions. Low pay and highly stressful working conditions. Demanding and possibly hostile clientele. No opportunity for advancement. Prefer five years of college training, experience and professional certification. Applicants must consistently demonstrate high ethical and morale standards. Must be able to handle volumes of paper work.

Nothing contained in this advertisement denotes anything new, but it is accurate. Further, our data show that the general public agrees with this assessment, so there are two key populations viewing teaching in this terribly negative way.

Professional teachers may argue, and probably rightly so, that they do not convey such negative information to students. Good teachers wouldn't do such a thing! If however, we may borrow from our counseling colleagues the concept that unresolved feelings are acted out if not dealt with meaningfully. Then, we can infer from the results of this study that teachers may well have negative communication patterns relative to their career choice which are acted out as unresolved conflicts.

Now let us consider the target population, the students as

perspective teachers. Once again, these data are explicit. Bright young people simply do not consider teaching a possible career. Consider the following interview results:

1. When interviewed, two honor students, both junior girls, expressed concerns regarding the quality of teaching awaiting future generations. Their primary reason however for not becoming teachers were poor remuneration and lack of respect. They also felt that contemporary women should have more important careers than teaching.

2. Joseph is a junior in accelerated classes. In his experience no teacher has ever suggested that he enter public education. If anything, teachers have frequently complained about the low pay, long hours and working conditions. Joseph has decided that he does not want to be a teacher. In seems he has been "scared-off."

3. Ralph is seventeen and a high school senior. No one has ever spoken to him or his classes about becoming a teacher. Teachers have not complained openly about low pay or working conditions, but they have casually mentioned the need to hold second jobs or develop another income source in order to "make ends meet." Ralph is not really "turned-off" to teaching and feels that he might enjoy working with young people. In spite of that, the low pay will probably prevent him from considering teaching as a career. Currently, he plans to become an engineer.

We suggest that these three examples portray what is happening at the classroom level. In one case teaching is not a viable consideration and probably never will be. In the second, teaching has been openly criticized and students have been "turned-off." Finally, for those for whom teaching has some intrinsic appeal the present conditions, as perceived by them and communicated by teachers, simply make it too unattractive an alternative.

We believe that capable students look well past their teachers for career models. From the data we have collected it seems equally evident that teachers are helping them in their search with the implicit approval of the public. Can it be that in this age of accelerated technology and service we are unwilling to offer our best young intellectual resources to public education?

One may wish to consider there is a well entrenched and effective pattern of communication which is bringing great pressure to bear on students who might entertain teaching as a possible career. We must assume that the countless media and education attacks on public schools have been perceived in a most negative way by the students we wish to recruit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a glimmer of hope. Despite all the apparent problems, teachers do report that their careers are emotionally rewarding, interesting and they are stimulated by working with young people. Those intrinsic rewards are difficult to find in our complex and stratified society. They are rewards that can appeal to the best and the brightest youth our society has to offer. They are the genre of rewards that have throughout the ages appealed to those who want to make a difference.

Career choices are often made from "tacit knowledge" rather than "empirical knowledge." It is hard to know the rewards of teaching until one becomes a teacher. Perhaps it is time to begin at the beginning, with simplistic inroads to overwhelmingly complex problems. Perhaps it is a time to slow the negative trends down and if possible make small inroads. How? In the Middle Ages guilds (societies, each having a specific objective and providing help and instruction to its members) were formed to serve their members, perpetuate the high caliber of their crafts, and provide vitality. While those times are gone, the needs which they served still exist and remnants of their processes can even be found in the teaching profession in modern times.

One example of this was the chapters of the Future Teachers of America (FTA) which proliferated throughout high schools in the 1950's. They provided students with information, insight and experience in teaching and gave teachers opportunities to extol the rewards of teaching as a career. They permitted students to gain first hand knowledge at a critical time when they were considering career choices. Perhaps some form of this activity could be revived through mechanisms already in place, such as peer counseling and peer tutoring programs.

Programs that promote the opportunities and importance of a teaching career, and that emphasize the future demand for teachers; need to be developed, properly marketed to the public, and delivered into the hands of school counselors and teachers alike. It's time to "bring the light out from under the bushel." Without these and other proactive efforts to recruit talented students into teaching careers there will not be enough teachers to implement the needed reforms and make the classrooms of America vital and effective. Should that be allowed to happen, teaching as a career will be barren of offspring, a guild without apprentices.